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4

Ethics and Nuclear Arms:

British Churches and the Peace Movement

by T. E. Utley and
Edward Norman

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Institute for European Defence & Strategic Studies

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First published 1983

© INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

ISBN 0-907967 04 3

Designed by Reginald Cline MSIA MSTD
Typeset and printed by Performance
Milton Keynes

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PREFACE

Because of its concern with religious and theological, as well as strategic, issues the publication of IEDSS Occasional Paper No 4, comprising two essays on the contribution made by churchmen to the current debate on nuclear deterrence, represents an apparent departure from our normal practice. But in exposing to critical analysis the arguments and assertions of the Christian peace movement, the Institute nevertheless remains faithful to its principal task, that of assessing the factors and developments which could affect the future of the Western Alliance. The active involvement in the unilateralist movement of a considerable number of clerics, some eminent, is one such development.

Even if, as our authors suggest, the unilateralist clerics have contributed nothing to the character of an argument which remains essentially secular and humanistic, there can be little doubt that they have lent a measure of moral credibility and respectability to the cause of one-sided disarmament. At the present time it seems unlikely that this cause will prevail in Britain. But this is not to say that it will have no influence on the quality of our military preparedness or upon the volume and nature of resources allocated to defence, factors which may in turn influence relations with our allies. The arguments advanced by Christian unilateralists therefore merit careful attention from those qualified to assess their status, as well as their theological and intellectual substance. After all, many of those in the Christian peace movement evidently believe that they have made a particular and distinctive contribution to the current controversy. This assumption is explicit in many of the comments of Monsignor Bruce Kent, the Roman Catholic priest who is general secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). It is also reflected in the pages of *The Church and the Bomb*, the controversial report of a Church

of England working party which declared nuclear deterrence to be "morally unacceptable", and in many other tracts and pamphlets produced by the Christian peace movement.

In the view of Mr Utley and Dr Norman, however, the unilateralist clerics have not merely reached the wrong conclusion: much more significantly, they have wholly failed to ask the right questions or to apply appropriate criteria, having been unduly swayed by political and practical considerations rather than by theological or even moral insights. As a result the churches have not initiated or even substantially influenced the terms of the moral debate about nuclear weapons, a failure which Dr Norman attributes to the general secularisation of Christian values in the West.

Dr Norman goes on to set out the grounds on which he believes Western policies of deterrence should be judged from a Christian perspective, while Mr Utley concludes his essay by explaining why in his view CND is unlikely to make a major impact on the political process.

These lucid and eloquently written essays are published as a contribution to the present public debate on nuclear deterrence which many of those in the unilateralist camp have demanded, but which in terms of speeches delivered, programmes produced, books and monographs published, has sometimes appeared to be markedly one-sided.

Both are edited versions of papers given at a seminar on Ethics and Nuclear Arms held at Bishop's Stortford, Herts, from May 16-18, 1983 by this Institute, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington DC, and the British Atlantic Committee.

July 1983

Gerald Frost

CHRISTIANITY AND THE RADICAL TRADITION

by T E Utley

Introduction

The object of this paper is to examine the recent controversy in this country over the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence; to set it in its historical context; to estimate the arguments deployed in its course both from the point of view of their intellectual respectability and from the point of view of their political importance; to assess its probable effect on the future course of British defence and foreign policy; and to consider what ways of presenting their case more effectively are open to those who believe in the necessity of nuclear defence.

Christian Pacifism

One prominent feature of the present debate in Britain about nuclear disarmament is the large part which has been played in it by a number of eminent clerics of all denominations. This feature is not wholly new. Between the two World Wars a minority of clerics in the Church of England adopted a totally pacifist position, and some of them (notably the Reverend Dick Sheppard¹) enjoyed considerable publicity. On the whole, this kind of pacifism was simplistic and absolute, at least in the manner in which it was understood. Its appeal was to the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, that utterance being conceived of as a series of moral prescriptions designed to regulate the behaviour of individuals towards each other and, by extension, the behaviour of states towards each other.

It is commonly said that this sort of pacifism permits of no argument or refutation, since it simply asserts that the use of physical force against human beings is intrinsically wrong. This prohibition of argument, however, cannot be sustained.

Since the appeal is to Scripture, the teaching of the Bible has to be taken into account in its entirety. The Sermon on the Mount has to be judged in the light of the Old Testament, which is largely a record of divinely inspired and directed wars, and in the light of Christ's affirmation that He came to fulfil and not to destroy the Jewish law. It is hard – I would go so far as to say impossible – to extract from the Bible a respectable case for the view that Christianity is a pacifist religion. Through the ages, the Church has certainly not drawn this inference. Individual Christians have deemed it to be their specific, vocational duty not to take part in armed conflict, just as other individual Christians have deemed it to be their specific, vocational duty to accept vows of poverty and chastity. A very few have taken a stand on the principle that everybody should follow their example in respect of armed conflict and poverty; but these are eccentric positions which have never commanded widespread acceptance and which, as interpretations of Scripture, have never had much intellectual force. This brand of pacifism presents no serious intellectual challenge and has virtually no political importance.

The Christian pacifist movement today bases itself on premises which are, superficially, more impressive. It has revived the neglected medieval doctrine of the "Just War". This doctrine consists essentially of two propositions: the first is that a war should not be undertaken save in a just cause; that it should, even so, not be undertaken unless there is a reasonable chance of winning and that, even if both these conditions are satisfied, it should not be embarked on unless the probable cost in human misery is justified by the object which it is intended to secure by fighting. These principles present no great difficulty. No one who is not obsessed by some romantic idea of the intrinsic virtue of blood sacrifice would dream of denying them. They express the ordinary calculations which statesmen make in deciding whether to go to war.

The second principle on which the doctrine of the "Just War" rests is that of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants. This obviously presents greater difficulties. In the first place, long before the invention of nuclear weapons modern warfare made such discrimination in practice virtually impossible. There is also, however, a deeper difficulty: even if it were possible to decide who is and who is not con-

tributing to an enemy war effort, and possible also to arrange to kill those in the first category while sparing those in the second, the moral defensibility of such a distinction (not only in our own day but in all ages) would be extremely doubtful. Those who serve in the armed forces, whether they have been conscripted or not, cannot honestly be presumed to be willing participants; those who do not serve cannot honestly be presumed to be wholly free from moral responsibility for the action which has been taken in their name. In any case, the principle of discrimination has always been qualified by the view that it relates to intention rather than consequence – that the destruction of non-combatants which may arise inevitably from attacks on legitimate targets is not necessarily immoral. It is hard to see that the principle of discrimination, thus qualified, can, in the modern world, be anything other than an extension of the original principle of proportionality. Its value, if it has any, is as a protection against wanton, careless, malicious and superfluous destruction.

Nevertheless, it is on this principle of discrimination that the Christian pacifist movement now largely relies. Its contention is that the possibility of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants is an essential condition of the “Just War”, that in the case of nuclear wars this possibility no longer exists, and that nuclear wars are, therefore, by their nature unjust. The peace movement today, therefore, does not renounce war as such, even though in practice the continued possession of nuclear weapons by one side in a conflict when the other side had renounced them would make the waging of war against the nuclear power futile and hence morally indefensible.

In reality, the peace movement might do itself a service by jettisoning this particular element in the doctrine of the “Just War” and relying solely on what it really believes – that the use of nuclear weapons would, in any circumstances, cause a degree of devastation which no possible result could make tolerable. This would at least open the way to that morally serious sort of discussion to which we are now perpetually bidden. It would raise various questions of profound importance: how do we make the moral calculation on which the use or non-use of nuclear weapons depends? do we start from the assumption that the preservation of human life as such is a

supreme good, or from the assumption that its quality must also be taken into account? do we take the view that the sudden and simultaneous destruction of vast numbers of people is obviously a worse evil than the subjection of many more people to a prolonged, corrupting and perhaps perpetual tyranny? do we take into account not only the casualties which would occur in a nuclear holocaust but also those (and they are very numerous) which occur daily under the rule of totalitarian regimes? have we gauged accurately the physical consequences of nuclear warfare (before the last war, for example, it was customary to say that conventional aerial bombardment would produce "the end of European civilization".²)? In any case, what sort of nuclear weapons are we talking about, and is there anything in history which supports the view (now widely upheld in the discussion) that the use of any one type of these weapons must inevitably lead to the use of the rest? Finally, is it indeed "obvious" that the risks which arise from the possession of nuclear weapons by nations with none but defensive purposes outweigh the value of these weapons as deterrents, even if they are never to be employed?

In fairness, it must be admitted that all these questions have from time to time been asked and that, from within the peace movement, some attempt has been made to answer them. But it is questionable whether the Christian contribution to the debate can truthfully be said to have been marked so far either by intellectual distinction or by moral seriousness. Among leading churchmen of all denominations there has been a tendency to rely on a stock of evasive platitudes. One example of this is the familiar observation that war is not "an acceptable means of settling international disputes". It would be pedantic to point out that this statement is literally false, since war is in fact often accepted, for want of any other reliable means to that end. What is more objectionable, however, is its implication that war is treated by anybody as a system of "trial by ordeal", and that governments actually get together and say to each other: "We cannot agree about this matter, so let us have a war to settle it, and we shall then know who is right". Wars arise from the determination of some powers to get their way at the expense of others by the use of force, and once this determination becomes apparent the choice facing those who are threatened by it is whether to fight or to yield.

Churchmen may well have views about the principles which should determine their decision and they ought indeed to have such views. But the mere statement that war is "unacceptable" is an abdication of the duty to offer moral guidance – unless it is to be interpreted as meaning that it is always the duty of those threatened by aggression to surrender, an interpretation which those who use this cliché clearly do not intend.

Another expedient adopted by many eminent churchmen, understandably anxious to maintain their reputation as public guides while not becoming over-involved in public controversy, is to say that nuclear weapons should be retained for their deterrent effect on the explicit and loudly-stated understanding that they will never be used. But since, these days, even foreigners in remote places can hear or read the pronouncements of bishops and politicians in this country, it is hard to see how this well-intentioned deception can have much chance of success.

Perhaps the greatest example of Christian confusion on this subject is supplied by the resolutions passed by the General Synod of the Church of England in February 1983. It declined to condemn the British nuclear deterrent but called for an undertaking that Britain would renounce the first use of nuclear weapons in any war.³ Since one of the chief purposes of NATO's nuclear deterrent is to redress the overwhelming superiority of Russia's conventional forces (a superiority which would render the first use by Russia of nuclear weapons unnecessary) it is hard to see what conceivable purpose would be served if Britain were to keep its nuclear weapons while renouncing their first use. Certainly, there can be no point in this recommendation unless it is accompanied by a recommendation in favour of a vast increase in Britain's conventional armaments, and this the Synod did not make. The hungry sheep are left to wonder how it can be immoral to use a nuclear weapon to prevent their native pasture from being occupied by an enemy and yet moral (or at least not in open contravention of the views of the General Synod) to use such a weapon purely for purposes of retaliation against a devastating attack which has already been delivered.

The truth is that it is extremely hard to distinguish a specifically Christian contribution with respectable,

theological credentials to the current peace movement. Many Christians who have joined that movement have simply accepted the language and mythology of rationalist radicalism. In particular, they have accepted the optimism typical of that tradition of political thought. They advocate one-sided nuclear disarmament in the belief that, by the force of emulation, it will automatically produce universal disarmament, just as they advocate passive resistance in the belief that it will immobilize the aggressor. Whatever construction may be put on Christ's teaching on these matters, it contains no traces of such optimism. Those enjoined to turn the other cheek were given no expectation that it would not be struck, and those urged by St Paul to do good to their enemies were offered as their reward the assurance that by so doing they would be heaping "coals of fire" on the heads of those enemies, a prospect which, incidentally, cannot have much appeal to humanitarian pacifists. The Christian pacifist movement must therefore be considered part of the general peace movement which has been a recurrent phenomenon in this country's politics for two hundred years and which derives its inspiration from political radicalism.

Radicalism and Peace

In his admirable book *War and the Liberal Conscience*, to which this essay owes a considerable debt, Michael Howard finds the modern radical peace movement to be a product of eighteenth-century political rationalism dating, in a coherent and easily recognizable form, from the writings of Thomas Paine (1737-1809).⁴ The movement's premise has always been that war is an unnatural condition produced by imperfections in social, political and economic arrangements. Remove these imperfections, and the impulses which produce international conflict will disappear; nothing could then be easier than to establish a system of international arbitration and law enforcement. In the absence of such a system, supporters of the peace movement have displayed a general hostility to the whole concept of foreign policy, and particularly to such ideas as "the balance of power". Generally speaking, they have not wished to be mixed up in such matters, considering what they are wont to describe as "power politics" as a disease for which

some general and universal remedy must be sought. In peaceful times they have tended to confine themselves to preaching the need for such a remedy and, in its absence, to favour a policy of isolation from all international entanglements. When peace is palpably threatened the radical peace movement has tended to split, between those who prefer all the risks of isolation to involvement in an international, "old-style" power-struggle, and those who have allowed themselves to be swept along on a tide of patriotic fervour, justifying their change of attitude by identifying the national cause with the object of establishing, by means of an inevitable war, the conditions of universal and perpetual peace. The single most prominent characteristic of the movement, however, has been its devotion to panaceas, its belief that the key to world peace, and to a state of things in which all traditional notions of foreign policy would become redundant, is some simple principle translatable into a simple policy.

The principles and policies recommended have changed with every phase of the radical movement in politics. At times the line has been that wars arose simply from the predominance of the aristocratic classes with their militaristic traditions, and that the subduing of these classes by liberal or democratic revolutions would destroy all the apparently multifarious causes from which war had so far resulted. Bentham, for example, believed that Europe would have had no wars but for the feudal system, religious antipathy, the lust for conquest and the uncertainties of succession. With the optimism characteristic of this kind of political thought, he believed that in his day the first of these causes was extinct everywhere, the second and third almost everywhere, and that the last could, at any rate in England and France, be abolished with great ease.⁵

For much of the nineteenth century the causes of democratic emancipation and national liberation were inextricably associated with each other in the minds of the radical peace movement, and what now seems to be a glaring paradox prevailed – that the proliferation of independent, sovereign nation-states was a necessary condition of universal peace. The notion that democracies were in their nature pacific unaccountably survived the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, which gave Europe her first example of the

destructive potentialities of a "people in arms". Philosophers like T H Green (1836-1882) could still believe, late in the century, that wars resulted from imperfections in the internal organization of states, by which he meant the persistence of civic and political inequalities.⁶

More realistically, a section of the radical movement, typified by Richard Cobden (1804-1865), held that universal free trade and the withdrawal of the state from interference in economic life would be sure guarantees of peace: his prescription was "as little intercourse as possible between governments, as much connection as possible between the nations of the world". This view persisted strongly until the eve of the 1914-18 war. One of its most fluent exponents, Sir Norman Angell (1874-1967), was still arguing on the eve of that war not, as is often said, that it could not take place, but that the complex commercial and financial interdependence which Europe had achieved had robbed military conquest of all its material advantages. This fact could be demonstrated by reason; once it had been clearly established, it was reasonable to expect, he implied, that no nation would be foolish enough to embark on such a course. "The capitalist", he asserted, "has no country".⁷

At the same time, however, another section of the radical peace movement was developing a quite different theory about the causes of war and the method of removing them. International socialists were postulating that it was capitalist competition for international markets which produced international conflict. The transition to this point of view was, of course, made easier by the Marxist argument that capitalism had moved out of the phase of competition into that of monopoly, and that in future "capitalists" would pursue their interests by obliging their own national governments to acquire markets through military conquest and then protect them by tariff walls. International socialist revolution therefore became in some quarters the fashionable panacea for perpetual peace.

Certain general characteristics of the radical peace movement in all its phases must now be noted. It has not been (it is not now) an unequivocally pacifist movement. Cobden said that there were in the peace movement "those who oppose all wars, even in self-defence; those who do not go

quite so far and yet oppose wars on religious grounds in all cases but that of self-defence; and", he added, "there are those who, for politico-economical and financial considerations, are not only the advocates of peace but of a diminution of our costly war-establishments". There has indeed been throughout a surprising similarity of rhetoric between all branches of the radical peace movement, and one of the predominant themes has been the sheer "waste" involved in the expenditure of vast sums on weapons of destruction. Much play has always been made of the positive and beneficent purposes to which this expenditure could be directed, the question-begging assumption always being that if the money were so employed and defence accordingly abandoned these purposes would still be possible. When it has come to the crunch the radical peace movement has always disintegrated. It is possible to speculate endlessly about the effect which it has had (particularly the effect it had in the 1930s) in retarding preparations for war and thereby making war more probable and more costly to win. In this respect, the influence of the Peace Ballot in 1934 has been much exaggerated. 90 per cent of those polled accepted economic sanctions as a proper means of resisting aggression; slightly over half were in favour of war as a means of resisting aggression, and only 20 per cent gave an outright "no". So far the radical peace movement has had little influence on the course of British politics. In the last resort, even the bulk of its own members have accepted the necessity of war in self-defence – though normally after much agonizing, well typified by the various traumas through which the Labour Party passed between 1935 and 1939 in its efforts to reconcile its belief in collective security with its dislike of war. One can convince oneself that it is possible to win wars without shedding blood (the fallacy of economic sanctions). When that fails, one can convince oneself that, while it is proper to fight the right kind of war (one for extremely exalted moral purposes) against the enemies of one's nation, it is wrong to fight the wrong kind of war (one for the selfish and niggardly purpose of defending oneself) against those very same enemies. Finally, one can convince oneself that the war which is being fought is in fact the right kind of war, or can be so converted by adding to the purpose of national defence comprehensive plans for the infinite betterment of mankind.

Such were the phases through which the Labour Party passed before the last war.

The Greenham Common Women

That CND, both in the character of its rhetoric and in the substance of its argument, displays most of the general characteristics of the radical peace movement as described above cannot be doubted. In one respect the similarity is particularly marked. The radical peace movement has always attached to its general advocacy of peace some particular political cause – democracy, the right of nationality, free trade or the destruction of the capitalist system – which happens to have captured the radical imagination at the time. One of the characteristic obsessions of radicalism today is sexual equality. This campaign is indeed only one aspect of a general preoccupation with the cause of equality as such; but it is an aspect which has become increasingly prominent in recent years. There are indeed traditional associations between women and peace. The notion that the fair sex stands for reconciliation while men are by nature warriors, and the idea that the bearing of children induces a particular regard for the sanctity of human life, are not inventions of radicalism; but radicals today have built on these traditional assumptions a general philosophy which, in its more aggressive forms, attributes a wide variety of social evils – and in particular the evil of physical conflict – to the fact that most societies are still, allegedly, “male-dominated”. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most conspicuous section of the peace movement in Britain today has closely associated itself with aggressive feminism, and in some instances with the open flaunting of lesbianism, the extreme feminine protest against sexual inequality.

A striking example of this theme is provided in an essay called “Take the Toys from the Boys”, by Miss Connie Mansueto (described as a “lesbian radical feminist”), which is included in an anthology recently published under the title *Over Our Dead Bodies*.⁸ Her thesis is that the participation of the West in the nuclear arms race is to be explained not as a defensive reaction to the Soviet threat but as a natural consequence of the competitive values and aggressive instincts of “white, educated men”.

Nuclear disarmament, she proclaims, is not enough. "These men," she asserts, "*could* kill us all with their nuclear weapons, but they are killing us right now by other means." These means, she declares, include in some parts of the world genocide and torture; but, in Britain, they are chiefly limited to "police brutality, rape, incest, beating and individual murder by individual men". Men, she avers, do not seem at all guilty about their violence but rather revel in it, as is indicated by their taste for sadistic pornography. Unless we challenge the men and the values which create the bombs, "violence in all its forms will continue".

All this may be dismissed as the fantasy of an obsessed mind; but, in its extravagance, its naivety and its implied devotion to the view that there is one, sovereign panacea for peace, it is only a particularly vivid example of the dominant characteristics of the radical peace movement through the ages.

In its language and mythology CND is, like its predecessors, a typically utopian movement. For example, it makes the characteristic assumption that if the West were to disarm its adversaries would be likely to feel impelled to do likewise. The movement also preserves the familiar ambiguity about pacifism itself, with few of its members going to the extent of denouncing all, even defensive, wars as immoral, but all proposing courses of action which would make the effective defence of the West impossible and therefore immoral by virtue of futility.

If history is to repeat itself, this peace movement will collapse like its predecessors at the appearance of a direct and unmistakable threat to national survival. What matters is whether in the meantime it will succeed in fatally impairing attempts to mount proper preparations against such a threat.

CND's Influence

It is not necessary, in this context, to consider the extent to which CND is being used (with or without the conscious consent of its members) as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. Suffice it to say that any movement opposed to military preparation in the West is bound to be exploited in this way. The fact that CND is being so exploited is not in itself a proof of the complicity of its members. But equally, critics cannot

properly be upbraided, in the radical jargon of the times, as "MacCarthyites" just because they point out that some members of the Communist Party play a prominent part in the movement.⁹

The evidence does not suggest that the main aim of CND – one-sided nuclear disarmament by Britain – has made any noticeable impact on public opinion. A recent opinion poll revealed that 72 per cent of those consulted were against unilateral disarmament, while 59 per cent were positively in favour of an independent nuclear deterrent. Ninety three per cent, however, strongly favoured effective arrangements for the dual control of American missiles established on British soil.¹⁰ It is very doubtful, however, whether this last preference can be attributed to the influence of CND. Those who demand dual control are at least as likely to be inspired by concern for the maintenance of national independence in the control of foreign and defence policy as by any general pacifist sentiment. Indeed, the findings of the rest of the poll suggest that it is this which inspires the anxiety felt on the point.

What effect, then, has CND had on the political parties? It is tempting to say that its most staggering success has been the conversion of Labour to the cause of one-sided nuclear disarmament for Britain, and by implication to eventual withdrawal from NATO. In reality, however, this development is the by-product of a prolonged and general convulsion within the Party which has removed Labour's centre of gravity dramatically to the left. Disarmament is a traditional cause of the Labour Left, and the transformation of the Party's defence and foreign policy probably owes little to the activities of CND. What is more, a section of the Party, led by Mr Healey, is fighting a cautious rearguard action against this transformation. Past experience might suggest that it will succeed. Unfortunately, the dramatic advances made by the Left in recent years give practically no grounds for such hope. It is probable that the most that Mr Healey can hope to achieve will be so to blur the issue as to conceal from the British public the true intentions of his Party. It cannot be denied, therefore, that the prospect of keeping Britain effectively in the NATO Alliance would be almost certainly destroyed by the return of a Labour government to power.

CND has had little, if any, effect on the Social Democratic

and Liberal Alliance. The Alliance, though ill-disposed to Trident, wants to keep Polaris and does not oppose the stationing of Pershing and Cruise on British soil in the absence of disarmament arrangements.¹¹ The influence of the SDP and the Liberals will undoubtedly be deployed against the influence of Labour's declared defence policy. It will almost certainly not be vigorously deployed to prevent the Tories from maintaining their defence policy.

By May 1983, the only effect which CND had produced on the Conservative Party was to persuade it of the importance of mounting a strong pre-election campaign in favour of the independent nuclear deterrent, of the placing of the missiles on British soil and of the discharge of our obligations to NATO. The Party was well aware that its immense increase in popularity over the last year was due to its conduct of the Falklands campaign and to its willingness to embark on that war. It also knew that the technicalities of the discussion about nuclear defence were likely to escape the attention of the electorate, and that what would emerge would be the single simple issue of whether we should disarm while our enemies continue to arm. The preferences of the electorate on this last point have never been in doubt. What was in doubt was the electorate's willingness to entertain the idea that any political party would in reality be willing to do anything "so damned stupid" as to strip the country of its defences while permitting its enemies to preserve theirs. The view that Labour does not mean what it says on these subjects is widely held and has some historical basis, although that basis has in fact ceased to be relevant. The danger which confronted the Conservative Party, therefore, was that of over-reaction, and it was a danger which was widely held to have been increased by the personality of the Secretary of State for Defence, who is distinguished by his taste for flamboyant oratory. It is also an observable fact that, since the last war, it has not profited political parties to put defence in the forefront of their election campaigns. That attempt was made by the Tories in the campaign of 1964 and under the leadership of Lord Home (then Sir Alec Douglas-Home), a man who gave no offence to the electorate. Nevertheless, the campaign failed.

Conclusions

The specifically Christian ingredient in the current campaign for one-sided nuclear disarmament by Britain consists almost entirely of the doctrine of the "Just War". The only surviving, relevant element in that doctrine is the principle of proportionality – that costs in human suffering should not be incurred unless they are justified by the moral value of the proposed result and by the possibility of achieving it. At this level of the argument it is necessary for those who defend nuclear deterrence to give serious attention to the likely results, in so far as they can be foreseen, of using particular types of nuclear weapon at different stages of a war. It is important in this connection not to ignore the potentialities of civil defence, and the possibility of diverting concentration from the development of nuclear weapons designed to achieve ever greater destruction to the development of defensive weapons designed to destroy the engines of such destruction. At all times the emphasis must be on the use of minimum force and on the readiness of the West to take part in general and enforceable nuclear disarmament, even at the cost of spending vastly more on conventional weapons.

No reliance should be placed on the argument that nuclear weapons can be retained as deterrents provided that it is made clear that they will never be used, a condition which renders their deterrent value useless. The "better red than dead" argument must be met head on. Although it is true that, traditionally, British foreign policy has not rested on the large, universalistic moral ideas with which American foreign policy is impregnated, the principle of fidelity to international undertakings has played an important part in the conduct of British governments and is thoroughly approved by the electorate. This principle itself implies the acceptance of an international society, to which Britain has obligations which may, in certain circumstances, take precedence over sheer national interest. The fact that Britain has enjoyed peace for a considerable time under the shelter of American protection, and the fact that it is Britain's duty to accept a share of the military burden and of the accompanying risks as a necessary means of discharging her obligations to the USA, should not be evaded. Neither should it be ignored that military preparedness

normally involves the possession of weapons which it is reasonable to hope will never be employed in an actual war, even though their use cannot be foresworn.

The radical peace movement of which the Christian peace movement is now an almost indistinguishable part has never cut much political ice in Britain and is never likely to do so. It would be wrong to enhance its importance gratuitously by treating it as something new and dramatic rather than as something intensely hackneyed – by according to it, for example, the right to demand public debates with Ministers, or by accepting from it offers to distribute statements of the Government's case.¹² It is essentially a fringe movement of eccentrics, and it should not be allowed to escape the consequences of that character.

The serious danger to defence, and to Britain's role in NATO, arises from the position which the Labour Party has adopted in these matters; this in turn is probably the result of the now irreversible change in the character of that Party, the causes of which have nothing to do with the peace movement. It is essential that those opposed to one-sided nuclear disarmament should do everything in their power to emphasize that Britain's participation in NATO does not involve a surrender of national sovereignty, and that the firing of missiles from British territory will never happen without the full consent of the British Government.

Notes

¹ H R H Sheppard and L Housman, *What Can We Believe?* letters; Jonathan Cape, 1939. Carolyn Scott, *Dick Sheppard: a Biography*; Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1977.

² For examples of this view, see Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*; Faber & Faber, London, 1927; Air Commodore L E O Charlton, *War from the Air*; Thomas Nelson, 1935; Capt Philip S Mumford, *Humanity, Air Power and War*; Jarrolds, London, 1936.

³ Full text of the resolutions in *The Church and the Bomb: the General Synod Debate*; Church Information Office, London, 1983. An appeal for a halt in the production, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons was made by the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a pastoral letter passed in May 1983 after successive draft revisions, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*; Catholic Truth Society, London, 1983.

⁴ Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*; Temple Smith, London, 1978. For an assessment of Thomas Paine's writings (*The Age of Reason*,

The American Crisis, Common Sense and others), see Audrey Williamson, *Thomas Paine: his Life, Work and Times*; George Allen & Unwin, London, 1973.

⁵ H L A Hart, Ed, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*; University of London, Athlone Press, 1970.

⁶ For an examination of this view, see M Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T H Green and his Age*; Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964; R L Nettleship, *T H Green: a Memoir*; Longman, Green & Co, London, 1906.

⁷ *England, Ireland and America*; Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1979. E H Cawley, Ed, *Richard Cobden: The American Diaries*; Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1952. Sir Norman Angell, *After All: the Autobiography of Norman Angell*; Hamish Hamilton, London, 1951. Angell's other works include, *Defence of Empire*; Hamish Hamilton, 1937; *For What Do We Fight?* Hamish Hamilton, 1939; *Raw Materials, Population Pressures and War*; World Peace Foundation, New York, 1937; and *What Causes War?* Foreign Policy Association, New York, 1933.

⁸ Dorothy Thompson, Ed, *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*; Virago, 1983.

⁹ Communist membership of CND was put at 15,000 by its general secretary at the end of 1982 (see *The Times*, 26 November 1982). Total membership currently stands in the region of 50,000. For a further discussion of the prominent role played by Communist Party members, see Alun Chalfont, *The Great Unilateralist Illusion*; in *Encounter*, April 1983.

¹⁰ MORI/*Sunday Times*, 23 January 1983.

¹¹ Electoral manifesto, *Working Together for Britain: an Alliance Programme for Government*, May 1983.

¹² *Guardian*, 8 January 1983; *The Times/Guardian*, 27 April 1983.

THE CHURCHES AND THE NUCLEAR DEBATE: THE COLLAPSE OF THEOLOGY

by Edward Norman

Introduction

It has been a most noticeable feature of the churches' recent involvement in discussions of nuclear defence that arguments have tended to derive from political and strategic considerations, rather than from theological or moral reflections. Both the churches corporately and Christian spokesmen and writers individually have followed the prevailing currents within sections of educated opinion – those radicalized sections which have affinities with the leaders of the campaigns for nuclear pacifism. The churches have not even initiated the moral terms of the debate. Except for the accident that the present British head of CND happens to be a Roman Catholic priest the moral context of the nuclear debate has been drawn almost entirely from secular references. Noted anyway in recent decades for their adhesion to trends of thought within the progressive sections of the Western intelligentsia, on the nuclear question the churches have approximated to a view of Man and of his conduct of public affairs which has few distinctly Christian qualities. Press commentary on the recent decision by the Church of England's General Synod not to endorse the policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament favoured by a committee which it had itself appointed to enquire into the question emphasized the fact that the Church leaders were preoccupied with political and practical rather than theological considerations.¹ The same was true of a second resolution passed by the Synod, which called upon the British government to forswear the "first-strike" use of nuclear weapons. The poverty of theological reflection on the question actually indicates the general theological collapse in recent decades of a view of Man

separable from the humanism of contemporary secular morality. This is one of the most astonishing phenomena of modern Christianity, all the more remarkable for being largely unperceived by Church leaders themselves and a sign, to put it at the most extreme, of the secularization of Western Christian values.

Pacifism and Secular Values

Pacifism itself is perhaps the oldest “theological” objection to Christian involvement with military defence. But until comparatively recent times Christians who opted for pacifism did so out of personal choice related to some special sense of vocation in the Christian life: an anchorite, or a member of a monastic or other ecclesiastical order regarded the worldliness inseparable from military undertakings as incompatible with the contemplative or specialist religious calling. This, however, led to personal withdrawal from a realm of activity which in general they continued to regard as proper: military defence was still regarded as highly necessary, but it was to be the work of others. Some extreme sects broke with this tradition in the later Middle Ages, and then the Quakers cultivated a comprehensive view of pacifism.² On the other hand, the pacifism of the modern world is largely secular. Whereas the earlier forms of Christian pacifism had to do with the enhancement of the individual’s relationship with God through the performance of specialist functions, the secular pacifism of the present time is all about the value of human life and the respect due to the moral autonomy of the individual. Pacifism has grown considerably within the churches during the last two decades, and this is pacifism in the secular sense. The theology of the 1960s, with its humanist view of Man and its emphasis on “situational” ethics, developed in a period of intense anti-war feeling generated by opponents of the Vietnam conflict, was secular in tone and content; it was virtually indistinguishable from the moral seriousness of the frankly secularized intelligentsia. Combined with the progressive “arts-and-crafts” pacifism of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the pacifism developed within this culture now has a powerful appeal to those whose view of

cosmic reality is largely or wholly materialistic. Modern pacifism has also shed the individualism of the past. Pacifists are no longer isolated people who continue to see the need for a general armed defence by others: they now agitate for society to convert itself to this opinion en masse. Christian pacifists, too, have followed this trend. In consequence, modern pacifism has become both collectivized and politicized. The objections of pacifists to nuclear arms are obvious, and Christian pacifists have no distinctive dimensions to add to them. Since there is no evidence in the Gospels to show that Christ had pacifist inclinations, Christians tend to generalize the individualist precepts concerning love of neighbour and to interpret them within the humanist culture of the contemporary secularized intelligentsia.

Most Christians in the Western world, however, are not pacifists, and the growth of "theological" attitudes to the nuclear question has, in the course of recent debates, rested upon a reappraisal of medieval "Just War" theories.³ The sudden retrieval of these theories is itself rather surprising: few of those who have rushed to acclaim "Just War" ideals would care to resurrect other medieval social practices or theories. A note of scepticism might be sounded with regard to their enthusiasm when it is recalled that the inventors of the "Just War" rules of conduct were also those who sustained feudalism, upheld personal servitude, excluded women, and enforced an enormous catalogue of capital crimes. A similar selectivity to that displayed by modern Christians in their appraisal of the "Just War" is also shown by those theologians who find in the prophetic sequences of the Old Testament the basis for their contention that religious people have an obligation to be involved collectively in politics. In their commentary on the prophetic texts they select those which have to do with God's involvement with human justice; they choose to ignore the fact that the society in which the "Just War" theories were evolved was one of accepted hierarchical inequalities which discriminated on racial grounds against non-citizens. The business of selection is therefore hazardous. As far as the "Just War" theories are concerned, it is likely anyway that they were not "theories" at all, but rather a coalescence of rules, never universally agreed upon, whose applicability to par-

ticular situations was highly random. It is this last quality which must characterize their modern use. What are these rules?

"Just War" theories and the Nuclear Question

The "Just War" theories as now employed by the churches accept that warfare cannot be eliminated, but that certain moral guide-lines can be acknowledged in order to limit its destructive potential. War must be waged exclusively by governments: civil wars, or wars of "liberation" (the styles of warfare which most attract the sympathy of modern progressives) clearly pose a complication and modern churchmen now tend to expand their legitimizing categories to include "Just Rebellions". Warfare, according to these "Just War" theories, must also be fought for a just cause; this is now often reduced to the defence of territory against aggression. Resort to warfare must be the last step; earlier steps should have explored diplomatic and negotiated means of resolving the dispute. There should be a formal declaration of war. Those initiating a conflict must have a reasonable hope of success. The destruction wrought by the conflict must be proportionate to the cause. In line with these conditions, once warfare has actually broken out there are held to be two leading criteria to determine its actual conduct – the principle of "non-combatant immunity" and the principle of "proportion". According to the first, those who are not actually involved in the fighting must be left inviolate, if that is compatible with the efficient prosecution of the conflict. This principle was implicit in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and the Geneva Convention of 1949.⁴ According to the second, the methods of warfare should not inflict disproportionate harm upon those engaged, nor harm third parties.

The difficulty of "Just War" theories is that they do not in themselves reflect the conditions of modern society. They were not even found appropriate or effective when applied to the limited warfare of the feudal hosts for whom they were formulated; they are certainly largely inapplicable to highly collectivized democratic societies whose means of destruction has kept pace with the enormous population expansion. The principle of "non-combatant immunity" illustrates this. As it

is now used in the discourse of its Christian exponents, the civilian components of a nation engaged in war are "innocent". It is the armed forces who are the legitimate targets, and in relation to nuclear weapons it is they who can, without moral hazard, be destroyed by the precise use of theatre nuclear weapons. There the difficulties begin: the same element of Christian opinion has often shown itself opposed to the further development of nuclear weapons because it is held that their use would make nuclear war, even in its limited sense, conceivable and winnable, and that escalation to a full-scale strategic exchange would be the result. Even without this complication, however, the principle of "non-combatant immunity", when applied in the nuclear context, appears to rest upon questionable premises. There is no reason to suppose, as Christians now tend to do, that civilian populations are indeed "innocent". In modern democratic societies, whatever the extent of the "false-consciousness" of the electorate, the people are participants in the actions of their leaders. Modern collectivism, furthermore, has come to rest upon incorporative notions of joint moral responsibility. However unideal this may be, the fact remains that now even more than in the past modern populations are morally involved in the collective action of the state of which they form a part. In its self-consciously progressive phases during recent years, Christian thought has gone to enormous lengths to emphasize the need for the Church and for Christians to be involved in society and government. Christians often appear to encourage others to take the realm of politics seriously, only to draw back once politics have become sufficiently turbulent to lead, as human politics often do, to real conflict. Civilian populations are not "innocent". The principle of "non-combatant immunity", while clearly desirable as a means of preserving human life in situations where this will not hazard the efficient conduct of war, is not an argument against nuclear weapons, despite their massive destructive capability. The same is true of the "principle of proportion": some scale is needed in order to set the fearful destruction wrought by nuclear weapons against the enormous size of human populations. It is a horrendous calculation to have to make, but it has to be concluded that, in proportion to the size of population, the numbers of those

likely to perish in a nuclear conflict could well be comparable to the numbers of those who died in the total warfare and ravishing of the countryside which accompanied much of the conflict in the ancient world and in medieval times. The effects on the environment of modern chemical weapons, or of the sort of de-foliants now sometimes already employed, are presumably similar in their long-term consequences to irradiation; so the catalogue of weapons which are morally inappropriate according to "Just War" theories would be very considerable, and extend a long way into the "conventional" category.

The most substantial objection to "Just War" theories, however, lies in the relativity of their application. As a set of rules they are capable of being invoked according to quite random considerations. The justification of revolutionary wars in modern times, the differences in the interpretation of "Human Rights" precepts between East and West since the Helsinki Accords, the disagreements that always exist about the factual basis for claims made before and during conflict and ordinary ideological incompatibilities make it impossible to conceive of any clear-cut, realistic situation in which these rules could actually operate uncontroversially. Christian opponents of nuclear weapons, who are now the major exponents of a revival of "Just War" doctrines, seem to suppose that warfare is always a consequence of the triumph of men's base instincts over their higher ones. But much modern warfare is, and the Christian defence of war should always be, dependent upon a belief that higher human ideals are being engaged. Christian progressives often actually behave as if this were the case: those well-known for their opposition to the West's contemplation of military defence are also often those who support "liberation" struggles involving armed force in developing parts of the world, precisely because "the oppressed" are thought to have such a morally unchallengeable case.⁵ "Just War" theories turn out to be highly relative notions about individual, moral and political preferences which would seemingly enable anyone to declare any use of force at any time for any purpose, morally indefensible. As applied to the nuclear question, their exponents transcend themselves, by going on to claim that no nuclear war can be "just", because of its violation of the principle of "non-

combatant immunity", its possible effect on third parties (through fall-out distribution) and its ecological consequences. Since nuclear war is therefore not applicable to a "Just War" categorization anyway, it is difficult to see why the whole matter has been drawn into the debate by the Christians involved. The Archbishop of Canterbury has himself declared that nuclear war cannot possibly be "just war", although he has avoided drawing unilateralist conclusions.⁶ Christian activists for nuclear disarmament are now calling for "nuclear pacifism", in order to distinguish between those conditions which might imply a "Just War" categorization and the nuclear options which can never do so.

The use of "Just War" concepts has at any rate divided the "nuclear pacifists" from the pacifists in the churches, for the implication has remained that some sorts of warfare are just. For the majority, Christian debate has therefore centred upon the question of whether nuclear weapons are really different in kind from other weapons; and those who have espoused "nuclear pacifism" have usually done so because they supposed that they were. In determining whether they actually are, it is difficult to see that there can be any distinctively "Christian" judgement: Christian opinions will derive from the same available data and from the style in which it is presented, as those available to secular observers. There can be no particularly "theological" views arising from such technical considerations, only the prior positing of theological principles. Should nuclear weapons be judged contrary to God's purposes – that is to say, that fifty million deaths are unacceptable but that five million are not, or that some years of environmental pollution are unacceptable when caused by irradiation but permitted as a normal by-product of "peaceful" industrial development – then conceivable theological principles could be adduced to rule against their use. But the calculations involved are also likely to be highly relative. On the other hand, a judgement as to whether war itself is or is not within God's design for human life is quite another matter. This is a point to which it will be necessary to return. But in what follows it is necessary to emphasize that the first Christian duty is to seek the avoidance of war, and especially of nuclear war, because the means by which it is fought are controversial in a number of ways. Christians

should support realistic disarmament proposals: for some this will not mean that one side disarms and the other does not. Christians should minimize the possibility of war: for some this will mean the use of deterrence. But all Christians should – let it be repeated – work towards situations in which physical force can be avoided. The conditions for the Christian life cannot exist where men plan the destruction of their brothers. In the real world, however, unideal conditions exist, and the choices are between relative and not absolute alternatives.

The Defence of Christian Values

Some Christians have rejected the option of nuclear defence on the grounds that it is immoral to threaten others with extinction. The “theological” principle here is love of neighbour – a condition whose fulfillment prohibits the threat of destruction whatever evil the neighbour may intend. For some, too, there is an element of vicarious suffering: that it is better to subject oneself and the whole of a free society to an opposed tyranny, as a form of witness to the peace which Christianity teaches, than to bear the guilt of preserving freedom by mass destruction. The concept of nuclear deterrence is plainly unacceptable to such a scheme of values. But this is a view which accords neither with Scripture nor with the history of Christendom. The development of the Old Covenant between God and the Jewish people was characterized by military struggle to gain possession of the promised land and when the Jewish people lost their freedom and were carried into exile this was seen as a judgement by God upon them, not as a witness to the peace or love of neighbour into which they had voluntarily entered by running down their defences. They were simply overwhelmed by military strength. Christendom, for its part, has always employed military strategy in order to preserve its values and to extend its boundaries, and it required the preliminary secularization of Western values for anyone to question this. It is not even clear whether the pursuit of peace is, as is now so often asserted, actually a fundamental Christian principle. The “peace” of the Scriptures was inner peace, interior serenity, *shalom*: there were certainly social implications, for

this was a personal quality which was to pervade the communities of believers, to mark them off from the rest of the world. But it was not "peace" in the global sense; it was not regarded as a Christian principle that peace between nations, in the great cosmic battle of good and evil, was a priority over "righteousness". Indeed, the Scriptures speak of righteousness as an active condition of things, which men seek to preserve in the real world of contests and moral rivalries – a world in which war has always played a part. This distinction is now so far removed from conventional Christian thinking that many will find it quite distasteful. So will they find another traditional Christian principle: that the religion is not essentially about morals at all, or about the social and political order, but about correct belief in God. The morality of Christianity was not, except in some refinements ("It was written of old time, but I say to you . . ." as Christ said), original. It was a mixture of collected Jewish precepts and the ethical postures of the ancient world. The originality of Christianity did not lie in its ethical vision, but in the salvation brought to men by the Incarnation of God; its ethical message is not especially distinguishable from the sort of human decency to be found in the "natural law" concepts of many non-Christian traditions. Hence the modern state of affairs in which a demoralized Christianity, having lost confidence in its spiritual insights, is able to espouse so readily the moral seriousness of secular humanism – it can do so because humanism is ethicist, and modern Christianity values its own moral scheme more than its spirituality. As far as the question of nuclear defence is concerned, the problem is of some moment, for those Christians who do approve of the practice of nuclear deterrence are precisely those who have some sense of Christianity's spiritual values and of their unique claim to preservation, rather than those who seek the mere maintenance of moral options. This is a question of ultimate and eternal values, and not just a matter of the relative improvement of life-styles here on earth.

This becomes the centre of the issue: why is it necessary to contemplate destructive force in the preservation of spiritual values – a paradox for many? It should at once be said that the Christian authority for this is internal only. In the increasingly plural societies evolving in the West, in contrast to the

monolithic qualities of traditional societies and of the new socialist collectivisms, it is not the churches' role to enforce their own insights on society generally. Nor is it their role to seek a "Christian" element in the international order by force of arms. But Christians, as citizens, do have a duty to consider which sort of society is best for their neighbours and, above all, which sort of society is the most conducive to the practice and transmission of spirituality. Church leaders, therefore, have a duty to advise their own members – but not governments – about nuclear and other defence issues. They rightly seek to disentangle the issues and to find "theological" bases; the sad thing is that, in the present debate, they so often merely echo the contentions of the secular order. The conclusion that their values are more to be treasured than individual life itself – the stark conclusion of Christians who believe in the justifiability of armed conflict of any sort – is reached in the end for social reasons. That is their form of service to mankind, to join in the cosmic conflict of values and to witness to a higher purpose of human existence than material survival.

Christians, therefore, envisage the material order as a landscape of ideological conflict. God has entrusted not just Himself, through the Incarnation, but the whole range of phenomena by which He is known, to the complicated human mixture – to the cultural conditioning of knowledge, to the flawed expectations of men, to the perceptions of ideal societies as well as to the realities of permanent imperfection in the affairs of men. And above all, He has entrusted the knowledge of Himself to men, to beings whose essential natures are corrupted. Here, at any rate, there is some common ground with progressive contemporary theologians of the "Liberation Theology" school – God is encountered in *praxis*, He is found in the material of human affairs.⁷ Men's perceptions of Him are rendered imperfect both by the individual's inherent corruption and also by the moral ambiguity of human culture. Yet God is known through Revelation, and can be worshipped – two areas in which ordinary human knowledge can be transcended. But there is no built-in preservative, no guarantee that men will achieve social frameworks in which children can be brought up in the Revelation or mystery of God – or can learn the special language of spirituality by which the evidence of truth, a com-

monplace of the human environment to others, is discerned and appreciated. Christians recognize that the knowledge of God, being inseparable from history, has to be actively pursued. It does not just emerge from whatever culture of human values happens to be around. Nor is it ever perfectly achieved. Christians are those who learn to live with imperfection. Above all, they are realistic about Man. They see that, far from being naturally good, his fallen state will guarantee, as Christ Himself predicted, that the world will be full of strife to the end of time. Precisely because life itself is about the cultivation of non-material values, Christians place these values above mere physical preservation. Men are not mere animals; the dignity and worth of human life derive from the human awareness of a permanent conflict of values. Herewith the great paradox: that mankind has inventive genius endowed by God which he has used in a flawed manner due to his inherent frailty as a spiritual being. He creates, in the one moment of his being, the mechanics and medicines of healing, and in the next, thermonuclear weapons. This is not an aberration but a characteristic of Man. Warfare is as much a part of his pursuit of genius as great art, or whatever. It is a token both of his ability to discern ultimate purposes and of the crudity of his delivery. Fallen men need the coercion that government supplies, and the international coercion that in the end entails war. In this scheme of things Christians are caught up. To surrender their values to their ideological adversaries through the submission of their bodies may, in some circumstances, be an appropriate short-term response to particular threats. But in many cases, in the broadest perspective of history, they will be called upon to defend themselves in order to secure the actual survival of their values, and to offer an example of engagement with the raw material of human conflict as preferable to mere existence at whatever ideological cost. Human dignity is related to the defence of values.

To the contemporary humanist, with his optimism about mankind, this must seem an extraordinarily antique way of thinking. To those who suppose that the life of Man can be enormously improved by education and social engineering, who tend to the belief that the better qualities of men will be released by moral precept, and that an ordered planet is possible without sanctions, the notion of a permanent conflict

of ideas derived from the inherent depravity of mankind will obviously not appeal. Through their absorption of the current fashions of thought, Church leaders of the present time are increasingly attracted to the same alluring prospect of a human rationality triumphant over former shortcomings. Hence the impulsion to "politicize" the faith, to build a better world by collective material means. The recent Church of England working party's report on nuclear weapons, *The Church and the Bomb*, actually envisaged a world in which warfare would be completely eliminated: nuclear disarmament was seen as the first step in that grand design.⁸ To Christians who believe in the fallen condition of men, such a notion is quite simply unrealistic, and dangerously so. For in the practical world of affairs, the voluntary surrender of the means of defence in the face of permanently hostile, ideological opponents – their identities changing with each epoch – appears irresponsible. At the simplest utilitarian level, furthermore, the recent history of the world would seem to suggest that lives are lost on a large scale, rather than preserved, under the sort of regimes to whom surrender might be necessary if the free world forfeited its means of defence.⁹ Christian insights into the nature of Man are thus reinforced by contemporary evidence relating to the consequences of his actions in perfectly characteristic situations. Since human societies were created, men have lived for most of the time under total regimes, the monolithic, traditional societies. Today Western Christians live in liberal, plural societies and believe them the most effective means available for the preservation of their values. Why are they superior, in that respect, to the monolithic polities which Christians once supported? The difference lies in the nature of modern government. The new, monolithic regimes of the present day are both collectivist and secular. Threats to the survival of religious institutions, therefore, are enormously greater than in the past. State education alone – a development of the last century – distinguishes modern government from its predecessors. Christians rightly sense that their hopes of preserving the faith of children as yet unborn lie in the maintenance of liberal institutions. But these institutions, both governmental and social, are fragile – they are untypical of human experience and, in the course of time, could well turn out to

have been an ephemeral flower which enjoyed only a short life before the coarse growths of human totalitarianism returned to cover the ground. The struggle to preserve the space in which their values exist is seen by some Christians as the ultimate one. To give up the struggle would be to reduce human existence to the animal matter of survival at whatever ideological cost.

Towards a Christian Understanding of Deterrence

All that has been postulated so far has assumed the worst – the actual use of nuclear weapons for defensive purposes in a possible conflict. It is now appropriate to consider the nature of deterrence in a Christian perspective. Here the terrain becomes easier. Yet it should be noticed at once that for the deterrence thesis to be credible there has to be a serious intention to deploy nuclear weapons should the need arise – and then to use them. Deterrence in its widest perspective also has provisional qualities. Precisely because mankind is inherently corrupted, and because at times priority is given to emotions over rationality, it has to be supposed that, eventually, someone will actually resort to the use of nuclear weapons. The deterrence thesis is organized around the assumption that mutual terror can postpone the event. It also supposes – surely correctly – that nuclear weapons cannot be eliminated, and that whatever its public declarations under the pressures of opinion, no responsible government which already possesses a nuclear capability would really surrender it. The bomb cannot be “dis-invented”. It is with mankind for whatever remains of time. The preservation of order through the physical destruction of its opponents, however permanent a characteristic of mankind this may be and however much this may accord with a religious view of Man’s actual nature, does still involve the evil of taking life. Deterrence, therefore, is intended as a moral force, to preserve order by sanctions which threaten violence without having to use it. Like warfare itself when undertaken for “righteous” reasons, it is the lesser of two evils – an argument frequently used in support of many comparable moral situations. It is also characteristically human: it is in accordance with human nature. Only those who really believe that man is capable of complete rationality,

of a realized altruism in his motivation, of a sort of perfectability, will suppose that moral discernment and rational will can keep the peace by completely non-violent means or, as in the present case, by a studied choice of less efficient weapons than those which are to hand, and to hand for their opponents as well. Christianity, with its belief in the fallen nature and the moral capabilities of men, does not subscribe to such a view. Contemporary Christian leaders who speak of permanent peace as a real possibility in human affairs – as many have now done in the nuclear debate – have simply exchanged religious insights about Man for secular ones. It is the doctrine of Man himself which lies at the heart of the nuclear issue.

Removing pacifism as such to a separate category, it is clear that for most Christians the issue resolves itself thus: is warfare, any warfare, compatible both with Christian morality and with obedience to the revealed will of God; and is there any peculiar quality about nuclear war which makes it different in kind from “conventional” conflict? The response to both questions goes back to the nature of Man himself. Firstly, warfare is a part of human life and always will be, because Man is fallen, and therefore incapable of exerting complete, rational control over situations, and because he is an inventive genius, able to envisage higher purposes for life and to inaugurate a sequence of ideological conflicts as a result. The God who is revealed in the Judaic-Christian Scriptures is one who encourages men to play their historical role of discovering and extending their inventive capacity. Human life is hazardous and noble; it has to do with the pursuit of righteousness through sacrifice and service. To the second question, the answer can only be provisional, for here there can be no genuinely “theological” insights. But the chances are that, given a proper perspective, the devastation and long-term effects of nuclear war do not significantly differ from other types of total war which can now be envisaged. There is one “theological” insight which is, however, pertinent. This concerns the false expectations which men have of life on earth, their unrealistic pursuit of security, their claims to happiness, even their demand for welfare. Nuclear weapons have restored to Man the perspective in which he used, before recent centuries, to view life on earth – as a frail existence, per-

manently under threat of imminent extinction. The much-dreaded psychology of the nuclear era is actually the normal psychology of mankind.

There is a final consideration. For Christians to participate in the nuclear debate at all is to recognize a social and political role for Christianity. To other components of the modern pluralism of Western societies it may seem inappropriate for Christians to wish to "enforce" an ultimate conflict of values on others, to argue for the deterrence thesis or the bomb as a means of preserving the conditions which they as Christians judge most conducive to the maintenance and transmission of their own beliefs. Christians should be careful to make it clear that their concern arises from an understanding of the place of men in the world which they consider to be the best, and should offer their insights as a form of service to their brothers. They should make it clear that they do not seek to coerce anyone into assent, least of all with nuclear weapons. Many will feel it inappropriate for the churches as institutions to have any authority except over their own voluntary membership, and to make political claims, since they do not have the expertise to engage in the discourse of political society. Yet many ought also to feel that, just as the divine is mediated through the real world of historical experience and mixed with the materials of common existence and the expectations of men, so individual Christians have a duty as citizens to involve themselves in the creation and preservation of "righteousness" in human concerns. It is in this second capacity that they should become involved in the nuclear debate.

Notes

¹ *The Church and the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, the report of a working party under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Salisbury; Hodder & Stoughton, 1982. For the full text of the debate on 10 February 1983, see *The Church and the Bomb: the General Synod Debate*; Church Information Office, 1983.

² For a statement of this view, see *The Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*, Chap. 14, Section 614 (Declaration to Charles II); London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Margaret E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War*; Swarthmore Press Ltd, London, 1923.

- ³ An historical examination of the medieval "Just War" theory is provided by Frederick M Russell, *Just War in the Middle Ages*; Cambridge University Press, London, 1977.
- ⁴ Text of the Hague and Geneva Conventions, in Leon Friedman, *The Laws of War: A Documentary History Vol I*; Random House, New York, 1972. Additional Geneva Protocols (June 1977), *Command 6927*; Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London.
- ⁵ The role of the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference, an affiliate of the World Council of Churches, has been influential in the development of this dual approach. For an examination of the WCC's position, see Ernest W. Lefever, *Amsterdam to Nairobi: The World Council of Churches and the Third World*; Ethics and Public Policy Centre, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1979; and *Violence, Non-Violence and the Struggle for Social Justice*; WCC publications, Geneva, Switzerland.
- ⁶ Address to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, 25 January 1983.
- ⁷ Some examples of the ideas put forward by the Latin American "Liberation Theology" school include, Rosino Gibellini, Ed, *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*; Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1979; Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*; Orbis Books, 1973; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*; Orbis Books, 1975; Jose Miguez Bonino, *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*; SPCK, London, 1975; Ernesto Cardenal, *Love in Practice: the Gospel in Solentiname*; Search Press Ltd, London, 1977.
- ⁸ Op. cit., p. 163. "The task of nuclear disarmament is only the first and most urgent instalment of the major political, social, educational, psychological and religious undertaking of eradicating war altogether from the world's agenda."
- ⁹ These points are discussed at length in P Towle, I Elliott and G Frost, *Protest and Perish: a Critique of Unilateralism*; Institute for European Defence & Strategic Studies, London, 1982.

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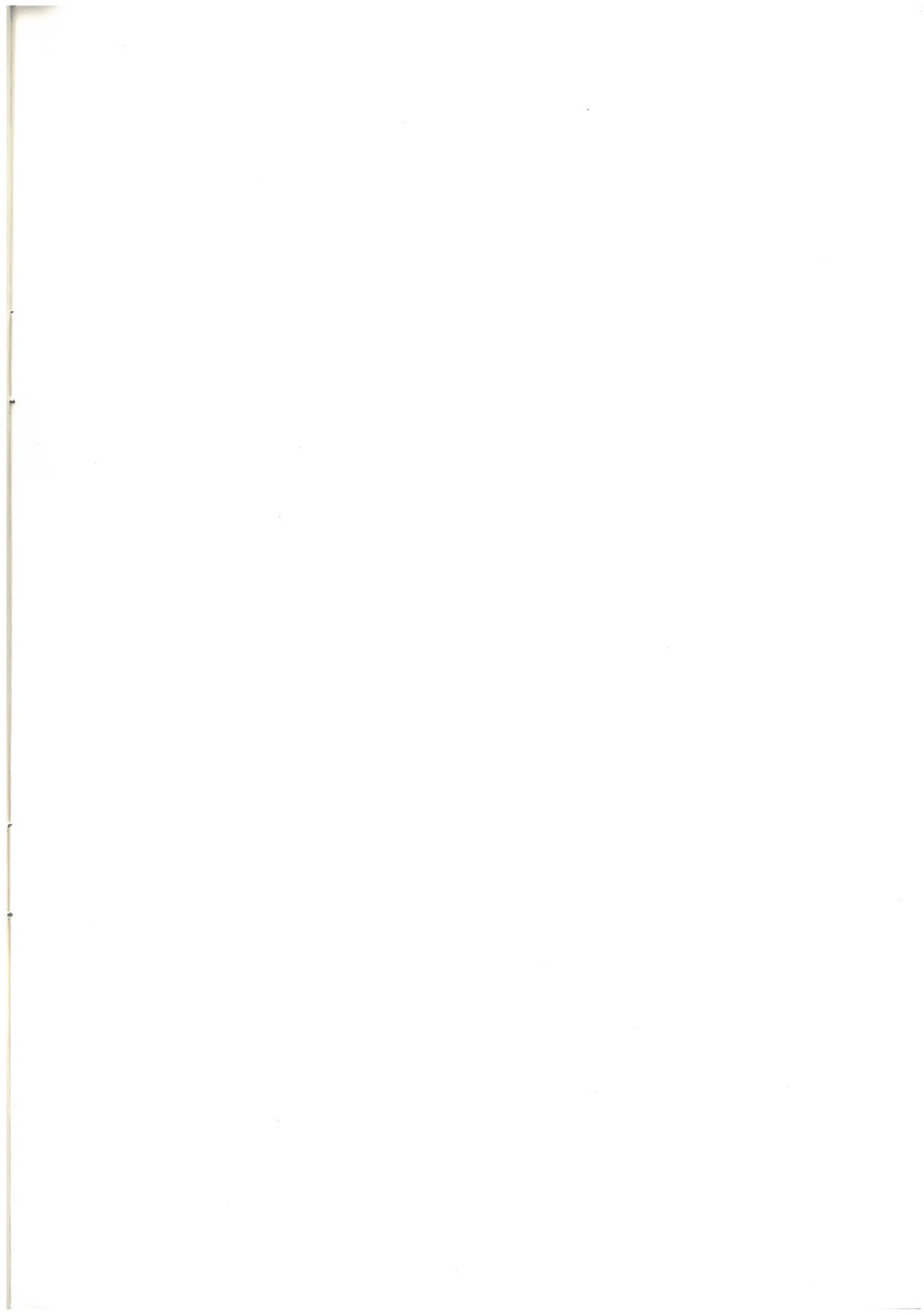
Nor would the Third World follow such an example: 'We believe that the idea that the Israelis, the South Africans, and Brazilians are going to be influenced by British actions is risible.'

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